DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 280 197 EA 019 347

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TITLE Collaborative Inquiry in the Arkansas Education Renewal Consortium.
PUB DATE 23 Apr 87
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Washington, DC, April 20-24, 1987). Funded by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College School Cooperation; *Consortia; *Cooperative Planning; Decision Making; *Educational Change; Educational Planning; Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation Criteria; *Improvement Programs; Information Needs; Organizational Communication; Participative Decision Making; Program Development; School Community Relationship; Task Analysis; Teamwork
IDENTIFIERS *Arkansas

ABSTRACT

This report reviews the collaborative and evaluative efforts of an Arkansas education renewal consortium comprised of two universities and nine school districts. The reform originated from a smaller project that aimed to establish a broad communication base and systematic planning for meeting student needs. The current project, begun in 1985-86, also incorporated improved communication among district staff and community members as well as staff training, administrative leadership changes, and renewal expansion to other districts. By 1986-87, nine districts and two universities formed the consortium and adopted priorities that include: teacher education improvement, at-risk students, administrator preparation, clinical experiences, and data gathering and analysis. To meet these goals, consortium partners agreed to participate in collaborative inquiry. A task force recommended methods to document the renewal process, which included the following: letters of commitment from districts and universities, minutes of meetings, documentation of activities such as teacher workshops and public forums, a yearly evaluative survey of stakeholders' perceptions, and a yearly progress report. The consortium nevertheless expressed concerns about sufficient time to compile information and about the value of data. Sharing information on a regular basis enabled inquiry considerations during this developmental phase, and the renewal approach offered those persons with legitimate concerns opportunities for resolution. A list of consortium members is appended. (CJH)

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COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY IN THE ARKANSAS EDUCATION RENEWAL CONSORTIUM

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American Educational Research Association
Annual Meeting
Sheraton Washington Hotel, Washington D. C.
April 23, 1987

EA 019 347

COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY IN THE ARKANSAS EDUCATION RENEWAL CONSORTIUM

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Abstract

The Arkansas Education Renewal Consortium consists of the University of Central Arkansas, the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, and nine public school districts geographically distributed in the state. Funded by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, this effort has been directed toward the goal of bringing about significant educational reform in Arkansas. To effect that goal, the members of the partnership have agreed to collaborate on issues of enhancing the roles of those involved in the instructional process, teacher and administrator training, and curriculum modification. To monitor these activities, partners are participating in collaborative inquiry to insure commitment to and involvement in the process. The elements of this inquiry, as well as the data-gathering activities necessary to support it, are discussed. Concerns arising during this process are noted.

COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY IN THE ARKANSAS EDUCATION RENEWAL CONSORTIUM

Introduction

The Arkansas Education Renewal Consortium is comprised of the University of Central Arkansas through the Center for Academic Excellence, the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, and nine public school districts geographically distributed in the state: Bald Knob, Cabot, Dardanelle, Fayetteville, Little Rock, Marianna, Sheridan, Springdale, and Stuttgart. Funded by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, this effort has been directed toward the goal of bringing about significant educational reform in Arkansas. To effect that goal, the members of the partnership have agreed to collaborate on issues of enhancing the roles of those involved in the instructional process, teacher and administrator training, and curriculum modification. To monitor these activities, partners are participating in collaborative inquiry to insure commitment to and involvement in the process. An historical perspective of the Arkansas Education Renewal Consortium in terms of the evaluative efforts made thus far follows.

Educational Renewal Model for Arkansas

The Arkansas Education Renewal Consortium traces its roots to Project ERMA, the Educational Renewal Model for Arkansas. ERMA involved three school districts, Kingston, Sheridan, and Wynne, in 1978-81, in an effort

to establish a broad communication base and systematic planning for meeting student needs. Federal funding channeled through the Arkansas Department of Education amounted to $169,167: $112,008 from ESEA Title IV-C and $57,159 from ESEA Title V-B.

Student achievement was targeted as a concern by the staff involved in the project. Comparisons of pretest and posttest achievement test scores yielded improvements significant at the 0.01 level. Documentation of this pilot effort was limited to simple analysis of standardized achievement tests results and a few case studies.

The Education Renewal Project

The Education Renewal Project followed ERMA and was funded by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation with $63,105 for the 1985-86 school year. The emphasis, like ERMA's, involved improved communication among district staff and community members. The districts involved included the Sheridan district from Project ERMA, Bald Knob, Marianna, and Stuttgart, as well as the University of Central Arkansas.

Specific goals addressed in the evaluation design included communication among school personnel and community members, their involvement in decision-making, the effect of Renewal on student attitudes and achievement, extent of adherence to new state education standards, quality of training for district staff, changes in administrative leadership, and expansion of Renewal to other districts. From instruments developed to

measure communication, involvement, administrative leadership styles, and student attitudes, a database was formed for later comparison of scores.

The Arkansas Education Renewal Consortium

The Education Renewal Project was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation again, with $107,723 for the 1986-87 school year. This was supplemented with $106,339 of in-kind and cash contributions from the districts and universities. The University of Arkansas-Fayetteville and the Cabot, Dardanelle, Fayetteville, Little Rock, and Springdale school districts were added to the project. The nine school districts and the two universities comprised the Arkansas Education Renewal Consortium (AERC). Shortly thereafter, negotiations were initiated to include the AERC in the John Goodlad National Network for Educational Renewal.

Priorities determined by Consortium members included the improvement of teacher education, the empowerment of teachers and principals, curriculum content K-12, dropouts and "at-risk" students, diversity and creativity in teaching, administrator identification and preparation, clinical experiences, inequality and inequity in education, the structure of the schools, and data gathering and data analysis. Progress toward these goals would require considerable commitment, effort, and actions. To document this process, the partners in the Consortium agreed to participate in collaborative inquiry which incorporates written, interpretive, and other records of activities. The development of this inquiry within the Arkansas Consortium may be instructive.

Collaborative Inquiry in the Arkansas Education Renewal Consortium

On September 4, 1986, the AERC Executive Board approved the formation of an Evaluation Task Force to address the collaborative inquiry of Consortium activities. It was decided that a representative group would be formed to determine how such an inquiry might be implemented. Each member group of the Consortium was given the opportunity to recommend individuals from their institutions to participate in the task force. Most of the districts and both universities responded with recommendations.

The task force met October 23rd and discussed together, as well as with Dr. John Goodlad, appropriate procedures to follow in the inquiry process. In addition, Dr. Goodlad suggested some reasons for collecting this information:

1) Systematic compilation of records and documents
2) Justification to superiors or others for time spent on activities
3) Professional responsibility to "leave a trail".

Dr. Goodlad pointed out that implementing such a process would take time and recommended a developmental approach: As the Consortium progressed in the Renewal effort, modifications could be made in the process.

The remainder of the discussion of the group centered around a draft of a paper by Dr. Ken Sirotnik, "Tracing the Process of School-University Partnerships: A Design for Inquiry and Formative Evaluation." Included

in it was an outline of a possible model for "process tracing" of the Renewal effort. The model was based on a five-year experience with a school-university consortium, with the intent that it be customized to the needs of the individual partnership. Taking the suggestion to heart, the task force chose to recommend the following items to the AERC Executive Board to be collected to document the process of Renewal in the AERC districts and universities.

Elements of Collaborative Inquiry of the Renewal Process

1. Letters of commitment from school districts and universities, including any revisions
2. Minutes of meetings
3. Copies or annotations of reports, monographs, articles, speeches, or similar items
4. Copies of newsletters
5. Documentation of events or activities such as teacher workshops, task forces, principal leadership groups, school-university retreats, public forums

   Minutes and/or substantive summaries of these events or activities detailing purposes, processes/activities, and outcomes
6. Annotated list of unanticipated consequences of Renewal efforts including development of a "cooperative learning network", receiving additional funding from private or public agencies, influencing state or local policies in schooling or the education of educators
7. Yearly evaluative survey of stakeholders' perceptions of what happened/is happening, issues/problems, successes/failures, future possibilities/directions, etc., with particular emphasis on school-university collaboration
8. Yearly progress report (no more than a dozen-page narrative) describing philosophy, events and activities, pitfalls, problems, and possibilities, etc., including a summary of the evaluative survey results

This list was shared with the task force members in each district and university for their perusal and that of other interested parties with the expectation that all comments or suggestions be submitted and incorporated before the next Executive Board meeting of November 20, 1986. At that time, the plan was presented to the Board. To provide an opportunity for the Board members to consider the proposal, a vote was not requested until the next meeting, February 4, 1987, at which time the plan was unanimously accepted by the members present.

Having been accepted by the Board, the process was implemented shortly thereafter. Actually, some district site directors had already begun submitting materials which made implementation that much easier. A research associate in the College of Education of the University of Central Arkansas accepted the responsibility for gathering the information and organizing it into a usable format.

The information collected thus far has consisted of the following items with respect to the list identified earlier:

1. Copies of the letters of commitment to Renewal from the school districts and universities
2. Minutes of school district and university Renewal-related meetings, subcommittees, Site Director and Executive Board meetings, and "Partners in Renewal", a monograph about the AERC
3. Copies of newspaper articles including Governor Bill Clinton's press conference with Dr. Goodlad, and local accounts of Renewal activities
4. The Consortium newsletter, the "Arkansas Renewal Consortium Update"
5. Memos and reports from task force and leadership groups
6. Unanticipated consequences are pending.

7. Copies of evaluative survey reports

8. Copies of annual reports

Concerns

There were concerns expressed by Consortium members about the time required to write the information and compile it, the types of information requested, the value in reporting it, the use of the data, and other legitimate considerations. The Renewal process itself contributed to resolving these issues. As described earlier, all of the Consortium members were involved through their representatives in developing the documentation procedures. Information was shared on a regular basis with the involved parties to provide an opportunity for any disagreements to surface early in the process rather than after implementation. Sufficient time was allotted during the developmental phase for careful consideration of the elements of the inquiry. The Renewal approach offered those persons with legitimate concerns, opportunities for resolutions of problems and outlets for the expression of their ideas.

The author wishes to acknowledge the following individuals who have contributed to the Consortium and without whose efforts this presentation would not have been possible.

School District	Executive Board	Site Directors
Bald Knob:	James Staggs	Jeff Heverling
Cabot:	Don Turney	Larry Rogers
Dardanelle:	B. J. Chandler	Ursula Chandler
Fayetteville:	Winston Simpson	Charlie Russell
Little Rock:	Ed Kelley	Angela Sewall
Marianna:	Charles Moore	Ora Stevens
Sheridan:	David Robinson	Steve Brown
Springdale:	Jim Rollins	Marsha Hayward
Stuttgart:	Willis Alderson	Marlene Jeffus
University of Arkansas-Fayetteville:	John Pulliam	Bill Klingele
University of Central Arkansas:	Charles Hodge	Joe Hundley

Dick Clough, past Superintendent, Marianna
Herman Lubker, past Superintendent, Bald Knob

Consultants

Betty Davis - Arch Ford Education Service Cooperative
Don Ernst - University of Washington
Mary Gunter - Northwest Arkansas Education Service Cooperative
Rob Kennedy - Center for Academic Excellence
Sara Murphy - Senior Consultant
Nancy Sindon - University of Arkansas-Fayetteville
Ruth Steele - Department of Education
Jackie Young - Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation

AERC Evaluation Task Force

Rob Kennedy, Chairman - University of Central Arkansas
Mark Crowder - University of Central Arkansas
Dwain East - Sheridan
Marsha Hayward - Springdale
Russ Johnson - Dardanelle
Sue Moore - Marianna
Mary Mosley - Little Rock
Martin Schoppmeyer - University of Arkansas

Apologies are expressed to anyone unintentionally not included in this list. In addition, special mention is extended to the students, parents, teachers, staff, and administrators who have participated in evaluation and other Consortium activities.